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GENEVA FOR RMA; DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I, NEA/ANE

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SUBJECT: ACTING A/S WITTEN PRESSES JORDANIAN MINISTER TO DO MORE ON IRAQI REFUGEE RIGHTS

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1 .4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: PRM Acting A/S Samuel Witten met on November 19 in Amman with Minister for Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) Suhair Al-Ali to press the GOJ to be more creative on vocational training, status and work permit issues for Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Minister Ali told Witten that the GOJ continued to do all it could for Iraqi refugees. Acting A/S Witten stressed that the U.S. needed more regular, detailed information on numbers of Iraqi beneficiaries to ensure appropriate levels of USG refugee assistance. Ali did not offer much in response to Acting A/S Witten's approach on residence and work status for Iraqis, but she promised to inquire about limits to Jordanian vocational training programs for Iraqis. End summary.

Work, Residency and Training--How Much Can Jordan Do

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¶2. (SBU) In a discussion with Minister Ali, Acting A/S Witten raised the three key refugee rights sought by Iraqis in Jordan: 1) the right to work legally; 2) the right to legal immigration status; and 3) access to professional-vocational training programs. Witten explained that the international community understood the burden represented by the Iraqis for the GOJ and was seeking innovative ways to share the load, assisting refugees and helping them prepare financially to return to Iraq.

¶3. (SBU) Ali cited the global financial crisis as an additional burden on the Jordanian economy and said that the government was working to respond to the needs of its own population, as well as to that of Iraqis. The Iraqi effect on infrastructure, such as water systems and schools, could only be addressed by strengthening Jordanian institutions. Ali continued by saying the residence and work issues were politically sensitive, and changes in GOJ policy would resonate negatively with the Jordanian people, many of whom are as poor as the Iraqis.

¶4. (SBU) On the issue of vocational training, the Minister said she was not aware that Iraqis could not participate in professional-track programs like those offered to Jordanians, and she promised to look into the issue. She added that it might be possible for international organizations to offer professional track vocational training to Iraqis and Jordanians if present programs were not sufficient to meet needs.

Congress Wants to Know Where USG Money is Going

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¶5. (SBU) Witten told Ali that many in Washington, including some in Congress, were concerned about the employment issues for Iraqi refugees, including the right to work. He also noted that the USG needs a clear picture of how many Iraqis

are being served, to ensure that Congress and others understand the way that the significant U.S. funds for Iraqi refugees were being spent. Witten noted that some in Congress might take steps toward linking additional assistance to progress, particularly on the employment issue.

The Minister objected to this notion, saying that conditioning support would have a counter-productive effect on all parties.

¶6. (SBU) The Minister explained that the GOJ would be transparent in channeling assistance to Iraqis. Witten stressed the importance of reliable data on refugee numbers and needs. He said that PRM would require its IO and NGO partners to provide an accounting of how many Iraqis directly benefited from their services. Without speaking to the numbers issue, Ali said the GOJ was already cooperating with international organizations to identify the needs of Iraqis. The Minister produced a draft copy of a WHO-sponsored health survey of the Iraqis in Jordan. She said she was reviewing the report and would release it shortly to all interested parties.

¶7. (C) Comment: While Ali and others in the GOJ clearly understand our concern on the status and work permit issue for Iraqis, she offered little in response to this latest approach for assistance. The Ambassador met with the PM to raise these same issues on December 20. Details of that conversation will be reported via septel.

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Beecroft